

Low-cost housing as driving force of reduction the socio-economic inequalities: Case study BMK program, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

In the world of low-income housing, BMK (Baan Mankong or Secured Housing) program marks a paradigm shift in Thailand history because it is understood to be a solution to the increasing socio-economic equality between authority and slum community. Thai government realizes the need of enhance more equitable housing distribution to slum community due to the significance of slum people in providing the work force for the continued social-economic prosperity. Empowerment has apparently been key subjected when slum housing encourages the socio-economic equality. Socio-economic integrated empowerment was promoted to enhance slum community capacity and asset by providing community access to the base of production wealth such as financial resource, knowledge/skill, and institutional network. However, the vital knowledge gap does not clearly emphasized is the association between the empowerment, slum upgrading program, and the socio-economic equality. Thereby, this paper attempts to establish the linkage of those key subjects.

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Case study method is employed to examine the practice of BMK program between 2003 and 2007, and then flow into the post-BMK developments. This paper utilizes the empowerment approach as theoretical framework for analysis and link those concerned subjects together. Particularly the up-scale of empowerment at the post-BMK period demonstrates the low-cost housing program as powerful driving force of increasing socio-economic equalities. This substantial movement manifests on the policy and institutional reform at the national level. The finding could contribute to the alternative framework that enhances slum community's capacity for policy maker and practitioner. (240 words)

Keywords: socio-economic equality, BMK (Baan Mankong Program), socio-economic empowerment

Introduction

In the world of low-income housing, BMK (Baan Mankong or Secured Housing) program marks a paradigm shift in Thailand history because it is understood to be a solution to the increasing socio-economic equality between authority and slum community. Thai government realizes the need of enhance more equitable housing distribution to slum community due to the significance of slum people in providing the work force for the continued social-economic prosperity. Empowerment has apparently been key subjected when slum housing encourages the socio-economic equality. Socio-economic integrated empowerment was promoted to enhance slum community capacity and asset by providing community access to the base of production wealth such as financial resource, knowledge/skill, and institutional network. However, the vital knowledge gap does not clearly emphasized is the association between the empowerment, slum upgrading program, and the socio-economic equality. Thereby, this paper attempts to establish the linkage of those key subjects.

The paper observes that empowerment approach present conundrum provides a framework for the reading of the way in which slum inhabitant access socio-economic equality through the practice of slum upgrading projects. The paper utilizes empowerment theories as analysis framework because it provides the link of the three key components and reveals the narrative of change in slum inhabitant socio-economic equality. Three dominant empowerment theories were encompassed as theoretical framework; Friedman (1992), Narayan (2002), Alsop and Heinsohn (2005). Next, case study method is employed to examine the link between three components. The finding could contribute to the alternative framework that enhances slum community's capacity for policy maker and practitioner. The paper seeks to demonstrate the process of BMK program that allows urban slum community to bypass socio-economic constrains between 2003 and 2007. The process then flow into the post-BMK developments that up-scale the urban slum community to achieve political obstruction in order to meet their housing needs, creating opportunities for collaborative society and state, and ultimately, more political equality of the powerless. This substantial movement manifests on the policy, administration and institutional reform at the national level.

Baan Man Kong Program (BMK or Secured Housing)

In January 2003, government announced two mega housing programs with different approaches to address the poor housing problem. Thai government have approved total grant of about 270 US\$ million for achieved an ambitious goal, 1,000,000 units within 5 years between 2003 and 2007. The first program is Baan Ur Arthorn (BUA or We Care Housing). This is low-cost public housing construction for sales under the National Housing Authority (NHA) organized. Ready to occupy affordable houses and apartments at subsidized rates have been offered to general low-income households. Initially, its target was the production of 600,000 units. Second is the BMK

program to be implemented by the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI) which aimed to improve housing, living condition, and tenure security for 300,000 slum households in 200 cities across the country (Boonyabanha, 2005:24-25). While the BUA delivery is consistent with the NHA top-down practice, BMK can be considered an offspring of decade of bottom-up practice that emphasises the community participation as a core process. By the year 2003, BMK has set target of improve housing and tenure security for only ten pilot communities (1,500 unites) and preparation in 20 cities. The quantity goal has extended to 174 informal community in 2004 (15,000 units) in 42 cities and preparation in 50 more. Between 2005 and 2007, the CODI expects to achieve 285,000 units in 200 cities.

The CODI initiates two unique concepts of BMK approach and implementation. Firstly, BMK build community first and then build house later (CODI, 2004:1). This concept implements through the collaborative saving and housing process. Secondly, CODI puts existing slum community organization and their local organization networks at the centre of a process of BMK development (www.codi.or.th/baanmankong, 6thOctober 2004). According to the former director of CODI (Boonyabanha, 2005:8) explains the BMK process in brief that low-income community and their local networks establish and manage their saving group. Then plan housing upgrading project through the community participation design. Once the plan has been finalized, and saving group has been secured, the CODI channels the development subsidies and housing loan directly to community organization, saving group. The fundamental framework of BMK demonstrates that slum upgrading project promotes the real access of the slum inhabitant towards socio-economic equality by two major mechanisms. Firstly, community managed saving group enhances low-income housing household's financial capacity. Secondly, housing process encourage slum inhabitant

in access social equality. The following sections discuss the BMK project's background and the delivery process as observed through the practice of Tawanmai community, Khon Kaen Municipality.

The BMK project's Background at Khon Kaen Municipality and Tawanmai community

According to the 1997 Khon Kaen Municipality Annual Report, the municipality divided local administrative structure into 45 communities. The 11 communities of those were considerable to an informal settlement consisting of 9,413 people or 6.2% of total population living in the municipality (KKM, 1998:12). The latest survey by the CODI's reveals that the KKM extended its authority area to 65 communities and its results in a higher number of informal settlement counted for 19 communities , approximately 30,000 people or 11.61% (CODI, 2003:11). The figure shows that the growth of slum resident number constantly increased into twice time only 6 years. Within this shift, the Khon Kaen municipality was promoted to a pilot area of BMK in the Northeast region.

BMK has carried out its implementation through two different levels. At the national level, the former Director of the CODI (Boonyabancha, 2005:8) mentions that the BMK strategy emphasises on the centrality of the slum community organization in defining and implementing responses their own housing problem because slum inhabitant is the best who know what their problems. However, they lack the resource and capacities to implement solutions. BMK then provides flexible finance and opportunity to co-work with their local network. At the local level, The CODI Northeast Office identified the specifically three major objectives of Tawanmai upgrading; to achieve security tenure in nearby relocation was the first priority. The second aim was to promote slum inhabitant in access to socio-economic resource. The lastly concern was to bring all actors together as powerful mechanism of urban development, in the form of citywide network (Udom, 18th March 2011).

By the year 2003, ten BMK pilot projects were implemented in Bangkok and vicinity, simultaneously the BMK Master Plan of the Northeast region was initiated. A year later, the scalability of a program then expanded to reach the nationwide scale. The plan was firstly implemented at Khon Kaen Municipality that included three slum settlements within 303 households benefited the BMK contribution (see Figure 1). At the year 2005, target group was extended to more 12 slum settlements along Khon Kaen railway lines which covered 600 families. Apart from the year 2006 to 2007, the CODI Northeast office aimed at target 600 families each (KKM, 2009:3-4).

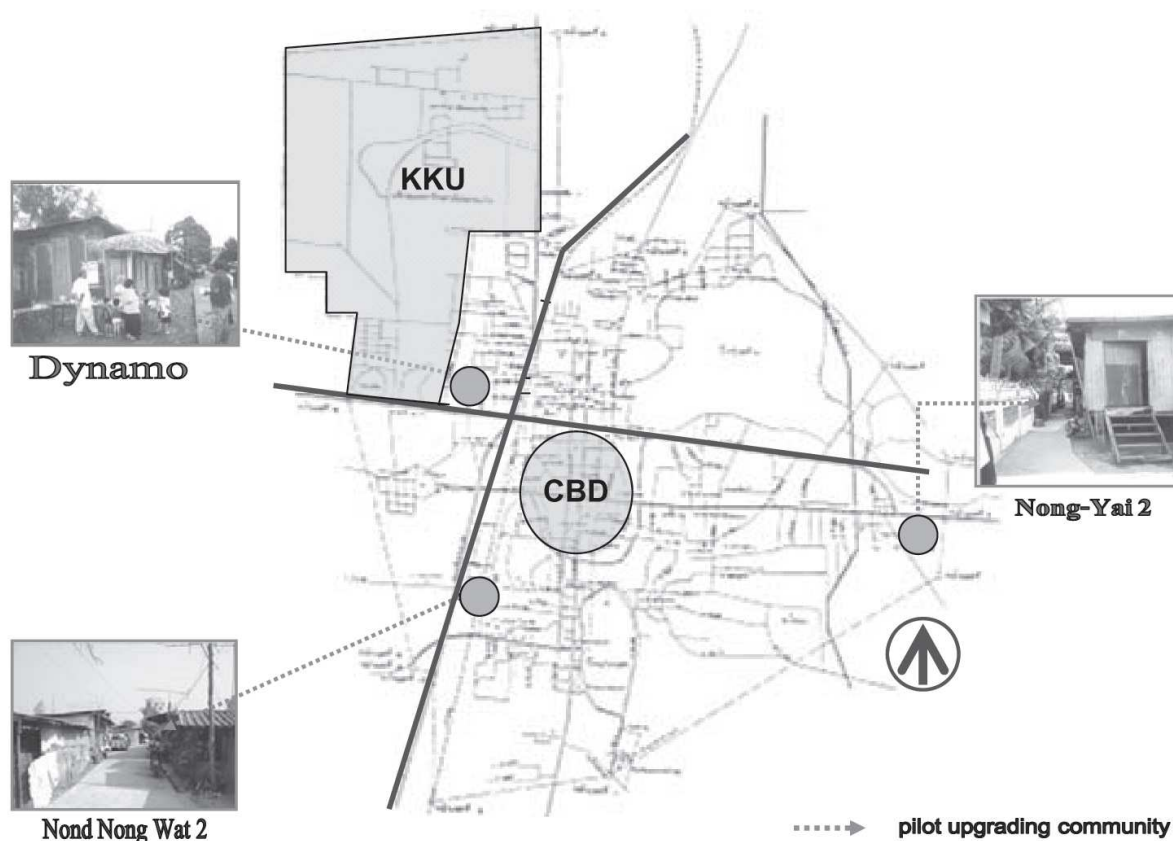


Figure 1: The location of three BMK pilot projects at Khon Kean Municipality (Tungsakun, 2008)

Framework of Analysis: Empowerment Theories

Empowerment is based on the belief that people have skills and abilities but they need asset and opportunity in order to express them (World Bank, 2006:115). Belief in empowerment claims that new abilities are best empowered by an expansion of assets and capacities (Sedan, 1997). In the context of urban slum inhabitants as powerless group of people who choices are extremely limited, both by their deficiency of assets and by their capacity to negotiate for settlement tenure security, an increasing of their socio-economic equality is therefore the fundamental of empowerment at personal level. According to Narayan and Shah (2000:12), empowerment means increasing one's authority and controls over the resource and decision power that affect one's life. An extensively on the explanation of asset and capacity are described below;

'Asset' refers to material assets, both physical and financial including land, housing and saving (Narayan, 2002:11). Such assets enable slum inhabitants to expand their horizon of choices and capacity to negotiate fair deals with landlords and it also increases their opportunity to socio-economic equality. Next, 'Capabilities' are inherent intelligence in individual and group of slum dweller. Capabilities enable powerless group to use their assets in various ways to increase their well-being (ibid). Empowerment powerless capabilities include social belonging, leadership and sense of identity. Asset and capacity therefore are values that give personal control over power to achieve their aim.

While Narayan's study (2002) and many scholars emphasis personal empowerment through assets and capacity, Alsop and Heinsohn's study (2005:10) extends empowerment toward broader scale, opportunity structure or supportive environment. They view the opportunity structure as the context of influencing project

outcomes and slum inhabitant performances at individual households, group or community. There are two categories of opportunity structure; the formal and informal contexts. The formal context is shaped by legal and regulation frameworks, while the informal context is influenced by social rules of certain groups, ethnics or class divisions.

In the contemporary literature, the last comprehensive empowerment theory has been purposed by Friedmann (1992). He views structural and institutional change as political empowerment. He establishes empowerment model, called 'Politics of Alternative Development' as an empowerment framework that looks to the mobilization of civil society at the grass roots and seek for change in the system of political relations and all corresponding institutions. His concept remarks that an approach must emerge from the bottom of policies in which the slum inhabitants continuously press for the support of their own initiatives. He urges that empowerment lies at the heart of practice at the locality because civil society is most readily mobilized around local issues. Hence, institutional empowerment centres on an individual and household, and to mobilizing them for political participation on a wider scale; national and international terrain. The significance of opportunity structure is also mentioned by many scholars for example World Bank (2006:79; 2002:11), Gruber and Trickett (1987) and (Garau et al, 2005:22). These perspectives highlight that empowerment asset and capacity are not sufficient to be powerful in bringing about critical change in national structure and power relationship. Empowerment the powerless is a much more challenging unfair structure of power and unequal distribution of power.

To extend the perspective of empowerment into the analysis framework, this paper defines empowerment is more than an individual-level that one has more asset or capacity. Rather, empowerment is process of expanding a collective action of powerless groups in influence external conditions over the political, economic and social structures that recognized as institutional empowerment. Empowerment framework therefore aims at increasing the power of disempower groups at two levels of application. The first level is personal empowerment that expands an individual or collective capacity. The second level is institutional empowerment that focuses on empowerment of opportunity structure change. Empowerment makes an effort to reform the existing conditions that obstruct slum inhabitant from housing development processes are associated with structural and post-structure perspective. The second level then takes into account on structural inequalities that affects entire powerless group rather than focus only on individual characteristics.

BMK and Socio-Economic Empowerment

Empowerment has becomes key issue when the CODI attempting to enhance socio-economic equality of slum inhabitant and their community organization. To achieve that goal, social and economy empowerment is integrated to BMK process that consists of three major courses of operations; saving group, design planning and building construction. Regarding to the analysis framework, the paper presents the empowerment of BMK program at two levels. Firstly, the foundation of empowerment lies in creating power for individual and group. This strategy attempts to up-skill individual and interpersonal capacity to achieve their goal by equips local residents to the direct action of saving and housing process. Secondly, empowerment promotes supportive environment for slum resident having more channel of accessibility to financial resource and institutional network. The following section highlights on the

relationship between slum upgrading project and socio-economic empowerment and this results in the socio-economic equalities of Tawanmai resident. The next section illustrates the incremental 'up-scale' of political empowerment practice at Tawanmai post-upgraded period that increases political equalities between the slum network and government agencies.

Tawanmai Community Background and Socio-Economic Structure

Tawanmai community was a squatter settlement of low-income people originally settled since 1970s. It was situated at the middle between Khon Kean city centre and the Khon Kaen University where recognized the two major employment sources for informal sector. Before upgrading, community was known as 'Slum Dynamo'¹ because it was recognized by the location where the front of the slum having been the plenty of dynamo garages. Base on local administrative structure, Dynamo slum was included at the Sam Leam 2 community (Khon Kaen Municipality, 2009:5). However, the Sam Leam 2 leader and genuine residents were reluctant to recognize them because Dynamo slum was informal settlement and did not have land ownership (Sam Leam 2 community leader, 22nd March 2011). However, slum had tacit consent by landlord because agent of landowner has been collected rent from resident daily.

The residents were formerly rural people who migrated from several cities nearby Khon Kaen such as Roi-et, Mahasarakam and Kalasin. The families with different background shared primarily occupation which all was searching for working in formal and informal sectors. According to community fieldwork between April and May 2011, Tawanmai resident is not a typical slum community² in term of homogeneous

¹ The study calls 'Dynamo slum' to namely this community at the pre-upgrading period

² Typical slum community is classified as a slum community had relative poor resident who predominantly migrants from rural to urban area for life and work opportunity. They share similar common characteristic of the powerless such as low-income, low-literacy and day to day employment (Ockey, 1997:10)

group. The dwellers consisted of various sub-groups and they had some relative wealthy, well-education and local indomitable person. Employment availability connects residents together as an informal network and it led into more intimately social relationship. The socio-economic structure of Tawanmai was based on the patron-client ties of the similar occupation such as group of construction worker, market labourer, garbage collector and paper crafting. Seniority has influenced on the resident's social values and the elders who were capable to provide work for members could become an informal leader of their client.

Another aspect of Tawanmai resident that revealed by fieldwork is employment and household income. The main occupations of Tawanmai inhabitants were daily labourer in the service sector such as paper making for funeral (temporary work of housewife group), recyclable waste collectors (34.7%), retail vendors (20.2%), building construction (14.3%), pedicab drivers (8%) and employee i.e. government and private company (22.8%). Almost 80% of dwellers were working up to three quarters a day in temporary daily employment. Less than one fourth of members have a monthly income and these long-term employees were migrant households. The overall resident incomes were apparently low, 59% were lower than 5,000 baht per month and the average household income just 6,650 baht. While people earn up to 200 baht per day, they have to spend almost all of their income on daily payments such as rent, food and bills.

The conflict over land tenure security came in the mid of 2003 when leasing contract was about to expire. To extend land lease contact, Tawanmai resident united together to negotiate with private landlord. According to the land value increased, the landowner denied revising the lease but they set land price very high for sale. Local residents cannot afford an expensive price therefore they had to move out without

knowing clearly where to go. Due to the personal relationship between informal leaders and local government officers, leaders sought to take advice from the Khon Kaen Municipality (KKM). Insecurity of land tenure apparently matched to the criteria of the BMK program. By the late 2003, the KKM purposed Tawanmai slum being one of the BMK pilot projects in Khon Kean municipality because the community has experiencing an urgent problem, eviction.

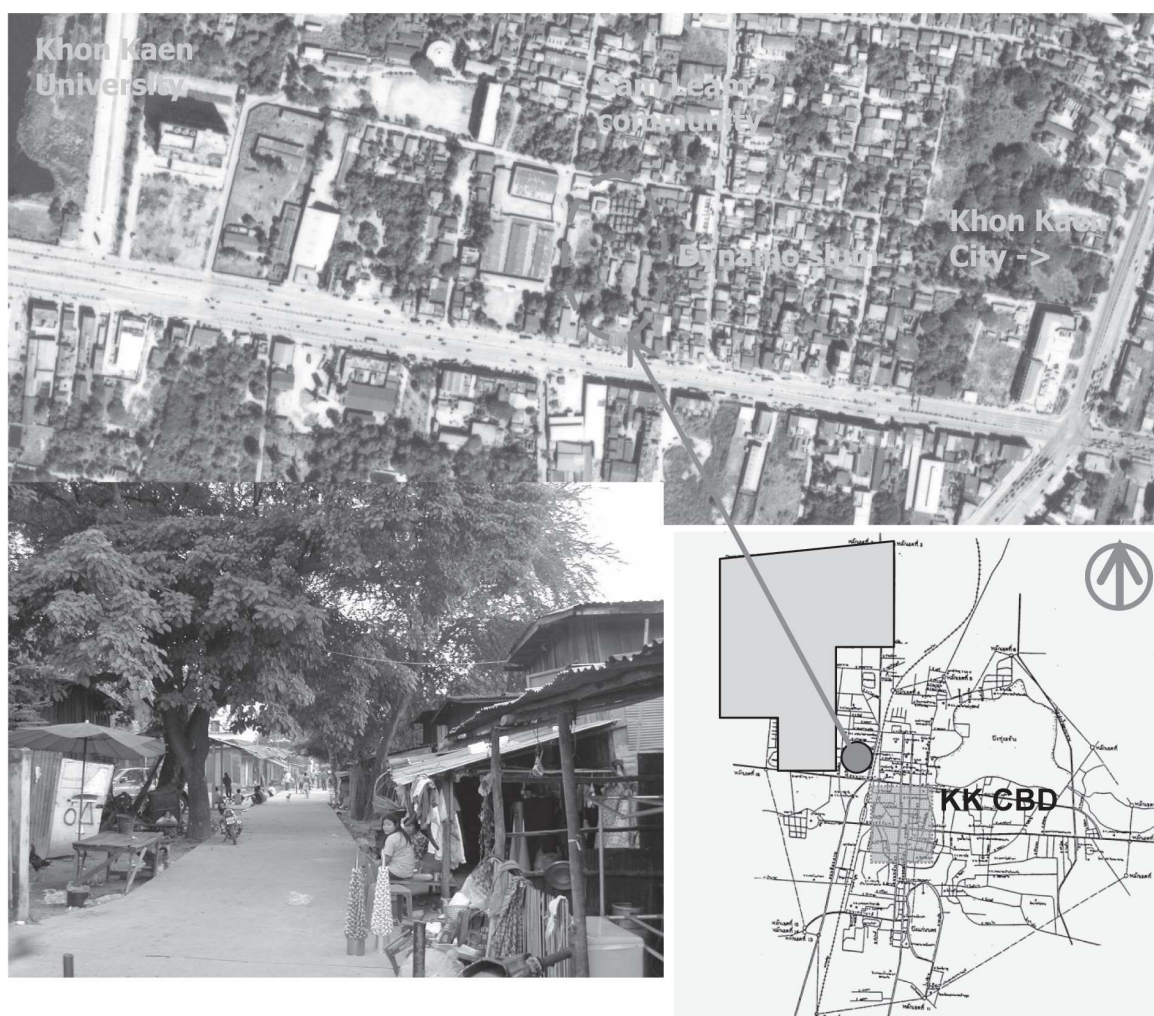


Figure 2: Location and physical environment of the Dynamo slum (Tungsakun, 2008)

Socio-Economic Equalities Signify for the Contribution of Socio-Economic Empowerment

Asset and capacity empowerment

At Tawanmai community, socio-economic empowerment as design under the BMK project has been implemented through the community participation upgrading between community organization and their local institutional network such as Khon Kaen Municipality, Khon Kaen University and Department of Cooperative. The strategy has correlation with Narayan (2002) empowerment framework that the socio-economic empowerment concerns with the household's access to the base of production wealth such as information, knowledge/skill, and financial resource. When a household social and financial capacity increases its access to these bases, their ability to attain objective is also increase. In other word, empowering the slum households is abiding processes which take place with the specific intention to enable people controlled over society's resource (Rezaei, 2007). Hence, the Tawanmai practice promotes socio-economic empowerment in order to build strong socio-economic collective power among local resident and local organizations.

The positive respondent of the socio-economic empowerment has been experience of the Tawanmai community, as individual and as a group, in different stage of community participatory upgrading. Firstly, the community managed saving and loan process creates the learning space for participant in term of improve the leadership skill. Particularly, woman was always the key stakeholder of all community process. Base on idea that woman full participation is a key to project's success (UNESCAP, 2008:8). The project encouraged woman to play full involvement in the saving process as a cooperative board. Thereby, common community members have been transformed to the new leader. The field practice data (Dhabhalabutr, 2009)

shown that woman was not only overwhelming the highest position but also occupied the majority seat of community board. At Tawanmai, the community leader was woman and 11 of 15 cooperative committees were woman¹. An emergence of women driven community and the number of new community leader represents socio-economic equality of local residents that they never experience prior the upgrading project.

Not only woman driven could indicated the economic and social equality, but knowledge gentrification was also illustrated this significant variable as well. According Achterbergh and Vriens (2002:223), the tacit experience was personal knowledge embedded in individual experience. The field practice reveals the positive data that the experience knowledge had gradually up-skill in the number of the Tawanmai people parallel with the upgrading implementation. Particularly, various building construction technique and skills often captured in the terms of know-how has collectively developed in the community participation process such as the skills of survey, design and building construction. In fact, residents were able to perform the certain tasks much more efficiently than general expectation. Slum inhabitants already had the experience to build community within different specialist teams of masons, carpenters, and plumbers but they often had difficulty articulating the technical or scientific principles of their work (Yap, 2010:338). Once BMK arrived, it was utilized as open space of revealing Tawanmai potentiality. As state by Blanchard, K.H., and Hersey, P (2007:13), empowerment is not giving people power, people already have plenty of power, in the wealth of their knowledge and motivation, to do their jobs magnificently. Hence, empowerment defines as letting this power out.

¹ Fieldwork was undertaken between April and October 2004.

Evident has already shown in below statement by one respondent whose achieve multi construction skill through the upgrading process. "Previously, I never did anything like this before, I got a lot of idea via meeting with local government agencies and NGOs but I don't have opportunity to practice. So idea just in the paper and it doesn't generate any physical outcome. BMK process is the open space of real practices for marginal poor and brings out our ideas to realistic. Even I'm a woman but I can understand BOQ, I can make brick and mortar, I can make measurement by telescope. BMK is the process of transformation the poor form unskilled people to handiness labour. Somebody gain improved competency for 50% or 100% depending on their ability but at least we got it, we can make it' (TWM-01). From the ground practice, there are two signals can be signify the progression of socio-economic equality. First, the individual and group skill had been gradually developed by collective experience in a large number of people. Second, the experience knowledge had emerged in number of neighbourhood along the process. Tawanmai practice confirms the linkage between socio-economic empowerment and equality.

Opportunity Structure Empowerment

The socio-economic equality has been expanding the larger level once the institutional network has been connected. Tawanmai co-operative created the widen cooperative to secured community capital circulation to the national agencies. The collaborative projects were undertaken with the citywide network such as the health project fund from the Thai Health Fund, the FRSN¹, and the NULICO². The secured financial support from various institutions contributes to increase community

¹ FRSN = *The Four Region Slum Network*

² NULICO = *The National Union of Low Income Community Organization*

development momentum as well as building larger network. The self-reliance of community organization over financial accessibility and stability can across the barrier in which the local agencies³ doubt about the community's capacity to sustain housing development on post upgraded phrase. Tawanmai have more channels to access financial assistance that means community can take some burden off being to the dependency with government agencies, and instead crates community financial self-sufficiency which later is gradually 'up-scale' to national alternative city development fund, NULICO.

Next, community co-operative could be seen as the outcome of socio-economic empowerment which strengthening the slum people competency and accessibility to financial resources. According to Couto (1989), the creation of community organization and their extension to as many as possible of the life domains are important indication of the community empowerment. Tawanmai resident can set up 'The Khon Kaen Ruam Pattana Cooperative', the first Khon Kean city low-cost community cooperative for housing, in May 2004 as a powerful mechanism of drawing community member together and aimed at collect internal resource into collective strength. Moreover, it creates channel for community organization to connected with external subsidise such as CODI fund, local bank, and Khon Kaen Municipality Development Fund. After the post-upgraded in year 2007, Tawanmai have subsequently played more active role of maintain of and drive the further community development thorough the social and economic based activities such as income generating group of paper mache' making, community welfare fund, neighbourhood watch, student carpool, and community herb garden. The diversification of community development project

³ *Khon Kaen Municipality, Khon Kaen University, and CODI Northeast Region*

to address multiple needs since post-upgrading does not only signify some certain degree of socio-economic empowerment effective, but also illustrates that Tawanmai residents achieve socio-economic equality. The establishment of Tawanmai cooperative and the innovative community projects evident equality has been achieved through the process of socio-economic empowerment.

Lastly, the socio-economic empowerment opens up the possibility of huge expansion in the number of Tawanmai households with a kind of connected financial organization based. Prior 2003, Tawanmai community did not engage as a member of The Union of Slum Community Network, under Khon Kaen Municipality patronage due to their inapplicable tenured right condition. Even the FRSN advocated the nine slum communities along railway line in Khon Kaen city since year 2000, but Tawanmai did not involve according to their unfitted location. As a result, Tawanmai was excluded from both networks. Once Tawanmai had entry into BMK program, they were no longer isolated community but they had allies with similar slum communities. Currently, Tawanmai community is the member of Khon Kaen BMK citywide networks which scales up their member covering 2,103 families across Khon Kaen Municipality (Chareansuk, 20th October 2008; Lapanun et al, 1998:101). The largely size of slum network is a larger platform to be able to negotiate with the better capacity, representatives with the collective force of huge number behind them that goes beyond individual households or community. This has been possible due to the contribution of socio-economic empowerment.

Above discussion confirms the link between socio-economic empowerment, slum upgrading project and socio-economic equality which are interrelated elements of BMK program. Contribution of socio-economic empowerment is manifesting on

several evidences including; leadership ability, the establishment of co-operative, knowledge gentrification, accessibility to financial resource, individual and group skill development, and institutional networks. By having these three elements, Tawanmai residents have socio-economic equality as mentioned in Narayan's study (2002), World Bank, (2006) and Sedan (1997). The research argues that the contribution of social and economic empowerment that embedded in slum upgrading project promoted slum inhabitant's socio-economic equality. However, the contribution of these three components has been less effective once community had encountered with problems at policy level such as state funding shortage and the restriction of building code regulation.

Political Equalities signify for the contribution of Political Empowerment

Although, the social and economic empowerment have been widely implemented as the main stream of BMK program. However, the empowerment as the policy approach was not entirely neglected but it was merged in slum upgrading process even on narrowly ground. Saving group, for example, promotes the real action of people participation in the decision making process that creates space of political exercise. Tawanmai case demonstrates how co-operative community election contributes to the political equality between sub-groups. The practice results in the community political structural change particularly between the high-income group and the low-income group. The electoral vote provided opportunity to the low-income group accessing decision-making power that was normally dictated by the higher income group. The proportion of cooperative committee could be seen as the evidences of political structural change and fortunately, it became to unintentional power balance among the altered income group. Totally 15 committee consisted of 5 high-incomes, 5 middle-incomes, and 5 low-incomes people. They are mixture of cooperative team in

terms of socio-economic status. The recognition of low-income group as legitimate member demonstrates political equality between different sub-groups.

While the contribution of political empowerment promotes slum inhabitant accessibility to political equality but those practices are self-government at community level. Once Tawanmai faces the problem at the structural level, local political exercise has limited capacity to persuade those problems. Approaching from Ife's perspective (2002:7), working with pluralist empowerment is not enough in bringing about the real change in power relationships, empowerment therefore is necessarily part of a broader agenda of economic, social, and political structural change. His view congruent with Friedmann (1992:84) who states act locally is not enough but policy transformation is requires. The creating of adequate institutional, regulatory arrangement and policy reform to assist community based development is necessity in implementation of political empowerment (Takahashi, 2009:75). The notion of empowerment as structural perspective (Clegg, 1997; Ife, 2002) hold the particular potential for an empowerment model that can be effectively reform the dominant structure of oppression at national level. The theorists (Mullaly, 1993; Williams, 1989, Gough, 1979) mention that the structural perspective resists the elites who act as representatives of unequal structure of power. These theory frameworks have highlighted the need of political empowerment at structural change level providing greater increasing of community's political equality.

Whereas CODI and their governmental network maintain socio-economy empowerment to increase urban slum dweller equality, the Four Region Slum Network (FRSN) and their NGOs alliance move into the area of political empowerment because over thirty year experience of defending forced slum demolition proves that community

financial strength and management skill did not ensure slum inhabitant's equality. Many proactive measures of anti-slum eviction have been implemented through the variety of slum resistance tactics and method such as mass protest, demand letter to relevant government agency and media, direct negotiation with the authorities who have fully decision making power, and join together with other worker and people movement organizations. As socio-economic empowerment had become less efficacious of anti-structural problem, the political empowerment has taken their place. Political equality has emerged to take advantage of political empowerment.

Opportunity Structure Empowerment

There are contemporary cases of the Tawanmai community elaborated the contribution of political empowerment towards political equality. The first case is the demanding of additional funding for BMK program. After the first period of BMK project expired in year 2007, less than 30% of total target or 80,201 units were achieved by the leading of CODI management (www.codi.or.th/baanmankong, 9th October 2009). To reach its 70% of the target left, CODI need additional loans of about 15,000 MB (NHA, 2009:36). Consequence, BMK program faced state revolving fund shortage and resulted in suspension of several BMK projects across the country including Tawanmai community. Tawanmai was paused the construction process and many cooperative members were withdrawn saving because they felt unsecured of BMK which would be cancelling by new government. Rather than undertaken passive strategy, Tawanmai residents were strike back at constrain by joined the demonstration with the NULICO and the FRSN. They requested government additional funding for BMK project. They had negotiated with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, and result in the approval of 6,000 MB to the BMK program (www.codi.co.th, 21st March 2009). By the year 2009, the budget channels through the new national campaign, Thai Kem Kaeng (Vigorously Thai).

Next, the certain rule of building code is impediment to the slum upgrading. The evidence gathered from the field at the Tawanmai community demonstrated that socio-economic empowerment was not being fully exercised when it encountered with the problem relevant to bureaucratic structure. Tawamai community faced the restriction of building code because the community master plan has set-back less than the minimum length of local building regulation. The rigid of building code becomes more seriously confliction between local government agencies and slum communities across the country when many of BMK projects face the bottleneck of regulation enforcement.

Building regulation problem is levelled up to the national level when the citywide network pushes forward it to the political issue. Slum network claims that building regulation reformed essentially needs because it creates facilitating environment for the slum to solve their own housing problem which is corresponding to the government 'Enable Market Policy'. Hence, it is important that the building regulations be adjusted, make more flexible, and friendlier to slum inhabitants. To achieve the visible change at policy level, citywide network encourages Tawanmai resident join the protest with the FRSN and the NULICO alliance to demand building code reform. The voice of Tawanmai people through the citywide network have become louder to the government due to the critical force of political power. As results, the building regulation was reformed and approved by government in 14th January 2011. Tawanmai practice demonstrates the direct connection between political empowerment and political equality. Interestingly, these movements strengthen the voice of slum residents at national level that goes beyond the capacity of socio-economic empowerment at community level. The paper proposes that the expansion of socio-economic equality towards political equality has been contributed by the gradually 'up-scale' of empowerment practice over several years.

Conclusion

The paper presents the evolution of urban slum inhabitant's equality across the practice of slum upgrading projects. The story also reveals the link between three key components never explicitly found in the formal record of Thai low-income housing practice. The paper applied empowerment theories as the framework to connect between three interrelated components; slum inhabitant's equality, slum upgrading projects and empowerment practices. The paper argues that the slum inhabitant in access to socio-economic-political equality have evolved and transformed through empowerment practice.

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